

NEW CHURCH *Life*

A bimonthly magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, as they apply to life.

MARCH/APRIL 2011



Easter Hope

Why did the Lord suffer and grieve so much in the last week of His life on earth? It was not for Himself, but for us. Understanding what these trials were and what they mean leads us into the hope of the Easter garden.

See pages 73 and 78.

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35TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2011

An invitation from Bishop Thomas Kline

You are invited to gather at the 35th General Assembly, jointly hosted by the General Church and the Bryn Athyn Society, June 23-26, 2011, in Bryn Athyn. Assembly registration will be held on Wednesday, June 22, from 5-9 pm. You may register online at www.gcassembly.org.

The Israelites were commanded to sound trumpets of silver to call the whole assembly together to march forward. These silver trumpets signified "truth from good, consequently the Divine Truth." (Apocalypse Revealed 502)

It is time to bring our worldwide church together in response to the call of the Lord's truth now revealed. The theme of the Assembly is "*Helping people grow closer to the Lord God Jesus Christ in His Second Coming.*"

In addition to our plenary sessions, we have more than 48 workshops, plus 18 afternoon activities. The workshops will cover a variety of areas including doctrinal topics, marriage enrichment, outreach, spiritual growth, parenting, women's interests, useful skills and many more. There will also be age-appropriate programs running for children ages 0-11, youth 11-18, and adults 18 and up.

There will be people from all over the world at this Assembly – more than ever before. We already have people coming from Korea, Australia and Africa and we expect many more. We want to have a broad representation of our church at the Assembly, and financial aid is available to help make it affordable for everyone.

*Come and celebrate the Lord's Advent in the
sphere of the Heavenly Doctrines.*

New Church Life

*A bimonthly magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through
Emanuel Swedenborg, as they relate to life.*

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NOTES ON THIS ISSUE

Why did the Lord weep over Jerusalem during His triumphal entry on Palm Sunday? Why did He suffer in that last week of His life on earth? Why did He grieve? The Rev. Michael Gladish explains that His torment was not because of what was happening to Him but because people were not receiving the spiritual truths He was teaching them. The message is that we go through the same doubts and vacillation today but the Lord never gives up on us. He is always there to lead us through temptation and doubt if we will follow Him.

In a message reprinted from the newsletter of the Boulder New Church, Pastor David Roth talks about the images of gardens in the Word, the gardens in our spiritual life, and the budding promise of the Easter garden.

In the conclusion of his two-part series the Rev. Derek Elphick asks *What Is Our Message?* Are we so intent on what the Writings say that we are losing touch with our listeners? Should we be fishing more from “the right side of the boat?” Readers’ responses to this study will be most welcome.

A resolution of the General Church clergy presented to the Bishop a year ago raised concerns about the direction of the Church and Bryn Athyn College. Bishop Kline reports on the progress made in the past year addressing these concerns.

Bishop Kline has announced his plan to retire as Executive Bishop in 2014. The Rev. Grant Odhner reports for a special clergy committee on the process for choosing our next Executive Bishop.

The Writings state that no one stays in the World of Spirits longer than 30 years before moving on to heaven or hell. What does this mean for a widow or widower whose spouse has been gone for more than 30 years – especially since there is no time in the spiritual world? The Rev. James Cooper offers some reassurance about *The Rule of 30*.

“What shall I render to the Lord?” John Parker of Toronto offers his own passionate convictions about giving “our first fruits to the Lord” – our responsibilities in supporting the Church we love.

The second in a series on new ministers in the Church introduces the Rev. Mark Allais, pastor of his hometown congregation in Bucleuch, Johannesburg, who is thrilled to be able to give back to the society that nurtured him and his love for the Church. Included is a sermon he preached for the launch of the PAUSE program, *Be Still and Know That I Am God*.

In a reprint from *New Church Perspective*, Alanna Rose shares her joy and discovery of the power not only from reading the Word but from meditating on it.

A Report From The Bishop

The Rt. Rev. Thomas L. Kline

A year ago a substantial percentage of the General Church Clergy affirmed a resolution that was to be given to the Executive Bishop, raising concerns about the direction of both the Academy and the General Church. It is important to note that this resolution was given to the Bishop and there was no expectation for a written response from the General Church and Academy Boards or the Administrations.

So, what actions have I taken since that resolution and how have I responded to the clergy? With a great deal of work we have accomplished the following:

Upon receiving the resolution I informed the clergy that I would be using the Bishop's Consistory as my primary means of addressing the concerns. (The Bishop's Consistory is a group of 12 priests appointed by the Bishop, but whose names are suggested by the Council of the Clergy, thus making it a body representative of the Council.)

We decided to have the Consistory send a survey to the entire clergy to find out what the real concerns were. (The Clergy Resolution was rather vague, and we needed to hear specifics.)

After the information from the survey was gathered, we prioritized the concerns and put them on a list for Consistory to review. This took place last spring.

While there was some overlap in the concerns expressed regarding the Academy and the General Church, it is easiest to separate out the issues for the sake of simplicity:

In the Bryn Athyn College, the primary concerns were focused on the lack of faculty involvement in decision-making and a lack of clarity about who makes decisions; a possible downplaying of the religious mission of the College in advertising and admissions; and potentially hiring non-New Church people to positions that should require a commitment to the New Church.

In the General Church, many of the concerns focused on the role of the clergy regarding their leadership in the Church, especially in their ability to participate in administrative decision-making, and the extent to which the Heavenly Doctrines are used as a underlying rationale for programs and practices.

We then got to work. I had Consistory meet with both Boards and members

of both Administrations. Key administrators were brought to Consistory meetings to hear concerns and to communicate progress to Consistory. The ongoing results of this work were reported to the entire clergy by circulating Consistory minutes after each meeting.

From the beginning, I had made the Clergy aware that my response would take time (actually a year) because I wanted to cite actual changes and actions, not just promises. So in December 2010, seeing that progress was being made, the Rt. Rev. Brian Keith and I wrote two documents, one for the list of concerns regarding the Academy and one for the concerns regarding the General Church, and cited progress that had or had not been made with each concern.

This response then was brought to Consistory for its affirmation that this information was valid, and then it was sent to the entire clergy as the Bishop's formal response to the Clergy Resolution. (It was not sent to the Boards or the Church, partly because it contained confidential survey information.)

This formal response from the Bishop was sent out just before Christmas with the plan that we would hold a series of phone conferences for the entire clergy in early January to give their reaction to the Bishop's formal response and ask any questions of the Bishop.

I am pleased to say that the response of the clergy has been very positive, even to the point of statements that "If the General Church and the Academy a year ago were where they are today, there would have been no need for or any thought of a Clergy Resolution." One pastor of a major society recently sent a letter to his congregation saying that he is happy with the progress made and encouraging them to support the Capital Campaign, and the uses of the Academy and the General Church Central Offices with their contributions.

What has changed that now has the clergy feeling positive? While I choose not to share the specific response I sent to the clergy, I can say in general:

Since the resolution, we have made significant strides in the processes used in both Bryn Athyn College and the General Church.

In the College the Administration has been restructured to involve faculty in decision-making, with the establishment of a new Faculty Council and the deans being given greater responsibilities. The College President's role has been more clearly defined with a direct report to the Academy Board and the authorization to establish clear processes throughout the College. A review of how the College presents itself to the world has led to revised web pages and admission materials and processes that more clearly describe our religion and mission. And no new faculty hires are anticipated in the near future, giving us time to find and train appropriate New Church faculty when the need arises.

In the General Church Administration there is now a concerted effort to involve clergy in decision-making. Several Board committees have invited

clergy to participate with them. The marketing function now has a committee of clergy overseeing its work. But most significantly, the Consistory is being used extensively in examining the doctrinal underpinnings of all of our programs and practices.

These are just some of the changes we have made to address the concerns of the resolution. While these steps may not fully answer all the concerns, I do believe that we have made significant improvements regarding all the major concerns.

I have communicated this, and more, to the clergy, and the response has been very positive. I will continue to work with the Consistory and the Academy Administration to be responsive to our church membership and the great mission of the New Church.

Selecting an Executive Bishop

Rev. Grant Odhner

Early in his tenure Bishop Tom Kline announced his plan to retire as Executive Bishop in June 2014. That time is drawing near and the process is already in motion to select his successor. What is that process? And what is the timetable?

Our Order and Organization states:

The Executive Bishop of the General Church is its chief governor and general pastor. He is confirmed by the General Assembly, but his selection is progressive. He is nominated by the Council of the Clergy, and the choice of that body is then referred to the Board of Directors of the incorporated Church for counsel and response. Thereafter, the nomination is placed before a General Assembly of the Church for confirmation.¹

In preparation for its job of nominating a new executive, the Council of the Clergy elected a committee of 12 people at its meeting in February 2009 to consider “The Calendar and Mode of Nomination of Our Next Executive Bishop.” That committee met regularly over the year and produced a report recommending a procedure. That procedure was approved by the clergy at its February 2010 meetings. A smaller committee to oversee and facilitate the nomination process was elected (of which I am a representative).

In general the process adopted by the Council of the Clergy is consistent with the historic understanding of ecclesiastical government in the General Church. Government resides with the Lord, and the clergy are His representatives in the church.² We are specifically taught:

“Order cannot be maintained in the world without governors, who are to observe all things which are done according to order, and which are done contrary to order. ...

“There must therefore be governors to keep the assemblages of people in order, who should be skilled in the law, wise, and who fear God. There must also be order among the governors, lest anyone, from caprice or ignorance, should permit evils which are contrary to order, and thereby destroy it. This is guarded against when there are higher and lower governors, among whom there is subordination.

1 “General Church of the New Jerusalem, A Statement of the Order and Organization,” 2008.

2 *Arcana Coelestia* 3670.2 cf. *Married Love* 21.4, 308.

“Governors over those things with people which relate to heaven, or over ecclesiastical affairs, are called priests, and their office is called the priesthood. But governors over those things with people which relate to the world, or over civil affairs, are called magistrates, and their chief, where such a form of government prevails, is called king. ...

“As priests are appointed to administer those things which relate to the Divine law and worship, so kings and magistrates are appointed to administer those things which relate to civil law and judgment.”³

Training, ordination and engagement in the uses of the ministry bring light in matters of doctrine and teaching. This is the work of the Lord’s “Holy Spirit,” which in this function is said to be “especially with the clergy.”⁴ In the General Church we have presumed that this light extends to giving leadership in ecclesiastical matters. And based on these general teachings we have understood that the selection of a bishop should be initiated by the Council of the Clergy.

TAKING COUNSEL

Yet any light that the clergy has in this nomination must meet with confirmation and consent on the part of the church at large. And there can be no perception of the uses and needs of the church, and of the qualities needed to oversee them, apart from taking counsel of the people who make up the church.

Because of the importance of making a decision informed by the states and needs of the church, the Council of the Clergy report calls for each full member of the Council to gather “input from the laity in his local area of focus” (whether that be a pastorate or other sphere of work). Each clergy member is to “report to the Secretary of the Council that [this taking counsel] did happen and how it happened, by June 1, 2011.”

The stated purpose of taking this counsel is:

- to provide an opportunity for the people of the church to consider the uses of the episcopal office and of the organized church, and to voice their concerns and wisdom on the matter
- to allow that counsel to affect the clergy person’s own perspective as he performs his role in the selection process

In taking this counsel the minister is asked to focus the discussion on the current uses and needs of the church, and not initially on a discussion of names of potential candidates, although names can certainly be offered as counsel. For example:

³ *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 312-314, 31 (= *Arcana Coelestia* 10790-10793, 10799)

⁴ *True Christian Religion* 146, 155.

What challenges are facing the church at this time? (locally, nationally, internationally?)

What qualities in a leader are valuable?

What experience is valuable?

Hopefully this discussion is a good opportunity for the minister to remind his congregation of the scope of the General Church which the bishop will be overseeing — e.g. its international dimensions, also the current structure of its administration (Outreach, Education, Board, the Central Office).

MEETING BETWEEN THE COUNCIL OF CLERGY AND BOARD AT THE JUNE 2011 ASSEMBLY

In June the General Assembly falls before our Clergy meetings. At the Assembly the Nominating Committee has been charged with making a presentation on the Episcopal Selection Process “to the gathering.” Arrangements are being made for this to occur at a general session. There will also be a Joint Council session to hear the input of the General Church and Academy Boards regarding “the uses of the Episcopal Office and the qualities desirable in an Executive Bishop.”

CLERGY MEETINGS, JUNE 2011

During the Clergy meetings immediately following the Assembly, the Clergy will explore as a Council the needs of the Church in the light of the Board’s input and that received by clergy members in their respective areas.

NOMINATIONS FROM CLERGY

Nominations from clergy members will be open immediately following those Council meetings and extend through December 1, 2011. Each full clergy member⁵ may submit a single written nomination addressed to the Nominating Committee. A minister becomes a candidate after the Nominating Committee receives two written nominations from members of the Council of the Clergy and after the nominee gives his consent to be a candidate.

The Nominating Committee will then prepare a report to the Council of the Clergy about the slate of nominees. The report will include curriculum vitae for each candidate showing his career assignments, positions held, education, and a list of papers written and published. It will also include an overview of the reasons given for nomination. This report will be sent out to the clergy in January 2012 in preparation for the February meetings.

5 That is, every priest who is employed full time in the work of the ministry or who has retired after a full career in the ministry.

CLERGY MEETINGS, FEBRUARY 2012 AND AFTERMATH

At our meetings in 2012 the Council of the Clergy will determine a nominee, using the voting procedure that it adopts this June. The name of the candidate that emerges will be presented immediately to the Board of Directors for counsel and response. Should the Board not have confidence in the nomination, the name would go back to the clergy for reconsideration. If the Board gives assent to the nominee, or if the clergy, after reconsideration, reaffirms its nominee, the Joint Council then determines how his name will be presented to the Church for affirmation (or non-affirmation).⁶

On the occasion of the previous episcopal selection the name was presented to the General Church membership for vote by mail and/or electronic media during the months following the presentation. If the process goes well, this would happen in the summer-fall of 2012. If the church at large gives a vote of affirmation the candidate would then be ordained into the 3rd degree of the priesthood.

A probable scenario going forward would be that the Bishop Elect would serve as an Assistant to the Executive, Bishop Kline, from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014. During that time he would ready himself for the role of Executive Bishop and determine any need he might have for assistance. He would assume the office of Executive Bishop July 1, 2014.

⁶ Though the role of the Board on this point is not spelled out as such in our Order and Organization, Bishop W. D. Pendleton chose the wording there with this understanding in mind. See *New Church Life* 1967, pp. 145ff.

The Real Reason Why the Lord Suffered

A Palm Sunday Sermon by the Rev. Michael D. Gladish

In the Gospel of Luke (19), in the story of the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we read that as He drew near the city He wept over it. He literally cried, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

This was not the first time the Lord wept, or shed tears. Famously, the shortest verse in the Bible occurs in John 11, not long before this, where we read only that "Jesus wept" when the people showed Him where they had laid the body of Lazarus.

They assumed that this was because of His love for Lazarus, but in fact, the context shows that it was because of His love and compassion for all of them and His overwhelming sadness that they did not recognize His power to heal and raise every one of them from the dead.

Turning back to an earlier time in Luke 13, though it doesn't say that He wept, He was clearly filled with grief and sorrow over the state of the church. There, in the midst of a series of parables, some of which predict the final judgment on the Jewish religion, on His way to the capital Jesus had said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Notice the reference to the celebration we call Palm Sunday, but in this case a direct quotation from Psalm 118 referring to "the Stone which the builders rejected, (which) has become the chief cornerstone." (vv.22-24)

It really makes you wonder what kind of a celebration this was on the original Palm Sunday. Everything seemed to be going so well. But the Lord knew all along what was going to happen, and He was filled with sorrow – not for Himself but for the people in that they had no idea what His real purpose was. (see Matt. 21:42-44)

We can't emphasize this enough: the Divine love is a consuming love for all others outside of Itself. Thus God, in the person of Christ, is completely incapable of feeling sorry for Himself. Rather His sorrow was because of

people's disbelief of the spiritual things He was teaching them.

So in Luke 23, as He was carrying His cross on the way to Calvary, many, especially women, "mourned and lamented Him," but He replied (from under the weight and burden of the cross), "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed, the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore, and the breasts which never nursed....'" And as you know, finally, when He was actually being crucified Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

With this in mind there are two concepts in the story of Palm Sunday that are really important to understand. First of all, it is the prelude to the crucifixion, and...

1. Most Christians regard the crucifixion as a glorious event full of the promise of redemption for all mankind because in that one act of supreme love Jesus atoned for all the sins of the human race, past, present and future, appeasing the anger of God the Father by His suffering the punishment that others deserved. This is called "the vicarious atonement" because it is the suffering of one person on behalf of another, so that the other, no matter how guilty, can go free. The New Church totally rejects that whole idea. We certainly believe that the Lord suffered on our account, but He did not suffer because HE was hurt, He suffered because the people He came to save could not understand or accept Him, and so He knew that THEY would be hurt. As it says in Matthew 21 about the Stone that the builders rejected, "Whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." (v. 44)
2. Still, just as the Lord knew what the people were going to do to Him, He knew the benefits that would be possible for them if He allowed them to do this awful thing. And those benefits were NOT freedom from guilt or responsibility, in fact they were just exactly the opposite. For He knew also that He would be raised from the dead (He had reminded His disciples of this many times), and He knew the impact that this would have on them, so that seeing Him again they would recognize their enormous mistake and come at last to believe in Him and follow Him and do as He commanded them.

Do you remember the first words of the angels when the disciples found the empty tomb? Or the first words of the Lord Himself when they met Him on the road? Or the first thing He said when He joined them in the upper

room after the resurrection?

Again and again it was “Fear not!” or “Peace be unto you!” Quite simply, when they saw Him they were scared to death (Luke 24:37) – and not just because they thought they were seeing a ghost, but almost certainly, too, because they knew they had betrayed Him, and now, whether ghost or real, here He was, and they must have expected retribution.

But of course the Lord’s message was as calm and consistent and reassuring as it had always been, only now with the added force and impact of His resurrection as a proven fact.

Paraphrasing, what He said was, “Now can you see?” “Now can you understand?” “Look and see My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” (Luke 24:39)

He knew that they would have a hard time believing in Him. He knew that they would betray Him. And He knew that the one thing that might convince them was His resurrection. So He said, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:47)

“Repentance and remission of sins.” Remission is another word for forgiveness. It means letting go. Sending away. Of course the Lord never did have any bitterness or resentment toward the disciples, but in demonstrating that by His compassion in the resurrection He was able to inspire the disciples to let go of **their** guilt and get on with the business of living according to His teachings.

In other words, being forgiven for their own betrayal of Him, it was now easy – and wonderful – for them to be able to teach forgiveness in His name to everyone.

Again, it was not about Jesus suffering on their behalf to appease God the Father; it was about God Himself in the person of Christ anticipating all that would go wrong, allowing it to go wrong for the sake of human freedom, and yet all the while working – through His grief and sadness – to convince everyone willing to be convinced that what He taught is good, and true and necessary for eternal life.

But now, let’s come back to the events of Palm Sunday. The story is told in Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19 and John 12, each time with slight and interesting variations. We know the main points about the Lord riding into the city on a donkey and great crowds going before and after Him waving branches of trees and laying them and some of their own garments down as a path for Him on the road.

In most Bibles this is called “the triumphal entry” because it was the

custom in those days for a new king coming to his coronation to ride on a donkey and to be received in this way.

It's interesting because almost everything in the story has something to do with the knowledge and use of TRUTH: the garments and leaves of the trees all represent truth in the form of knowledge, the donkey truth in the form of reasoning, and a king rules his people according to the laws of the land, which are also forms of truth (or at least, their understanding of the truth).

But the people – both His friends and His enemies – all thought that the Lord was coming into Jerusalem to take over from Herod as a worldly king, ruling in the world according to worldly ideas of the truth. They were thrilled about this because they hated Herod and they wanted to see his government overthrown.

They were missing the whole point, of course, but even so there was an important purpose served by this outwardly happy procession, and that is that it represented, even if only outwardly, the deeper reality that the Lord is our king, that He is meant to rule in our lives, and that in spite of all this He will only rule with us if we let Him do so. He does not demand. He does not compel. He doesn't even resist if we determine to shut Him out of our lives. He will allow us to do that. But in doing so He will be terribly sad, and we can even imagine Him still today weeping over what we are missing if we reject Him and all that He represents.

In fact, our spiritual lives today are filled with changes of state not unlike the drastic changes that took place in the story leading up to the Lord's resurrection. And we can relate them specifically to the way we receive the Lord in His new revelation of the Writings for the New Church.

1. First there is a real sense of excitement and promise in these wonderful new doctrines. They answer our questions. They minister to us and give us hope. They open our eyes, free us from spiritual corruption and restore our sense of well-being. They expose the weaknesses and falsities of other faiths, which gives us a kind of proud satisfaction. We begin to expect great things.
2. But then we begin to experience disappointments. The teachings are challenging. They confront us as the Lord confronted the Pharisees, criticizing, even condemning our worldly attitudes. We begin to feel that too much is expected of us. And we find the cynicism of the world hard to resist. Maybe it is all just a fantasy after all. Maybe if we force the Lord's hand He will respond by overwhelming our spiritual enemies. Maybe, like Judas, we say, "Lord if You are who You say You are, deal with this!" But He doesn't. And so we think

He doesn't care. We lose heart, we lose faith and we turn away from the truth. We give up. We allow the Lord in our lives to be put to death — tortured, crucified.

3. The Lord, however, does not leave us. And if, in spite of everything, some affection for His truth remains, He can and will appear again, His truth restored to life, the whole body of His teaching miraculously transformed, speaking to us as before but with new meaning as we see the power of His Word.

So we vacillate back and forth, believing, doubting and believing again; accepting as long as it is comfortable to do so, rejecting when the going gets tough, and accepting again when we can see more clearly.

This is not to say that we should vacillate like that, but the Lord knows we will, and He knows that the doubts and temptations are all part of our spiritual growth. So He perseveres with us and never condemns us in spite of our mistakes. Of course, we may condemn ourselves through a final choice to reject His love, but the story of Palm Sunday shows that His love for us is constant and His determination to help us is unrelenting.

He was not thrilled by the events of that day, for He knew the excitement was all superficial, and He knew what was going to happen next. But looking back on it now, and thinking also of the Lord coming in to the center of our spiritual lives by means of careful thought and application of the truths of His Word, we can rejoice with real conviction and be glad that He has come again to teach anew and to lead with power and glory, to restore His kingdom – not His worldly kingdom but His heavenly kingdom – to us.

Lessons: Matthew 21:1-19 Psalm 118:1-4, 22-29 Arcana Caelestia 9212:6



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Michael D. Gladish was ordained in 1973 and into the second degree in 1974. He is pastor of the Washington New Church Society and School in Mitchellville, Maryland, and Regional Pastor for the Southeastern United States. He has served previously in Toronto; Hurstville, Australia; Los Angeles; the Calgary New Church and Dawson Creek, British Columbia. He was also Executive Vice President for the General Church in Canada. He and his wife, Ginny (de Maine), live in Mitchellville, and have six children.

The Easter Garden

Rev. David C. Roth

Imagine the darkness of night. Picture it as the night giving way to daylight, right before sunrise. There is mist in the air, the moon is still in the sky, there is a splendor of colors at the rising of the sun. A new day is dawning, but it is not just another day.

Picture the scene at the garden with the tomb in which the body of Jesus had been lain, just two days before. You can imagine the dew on the flowers and leaves. Into this scene walks a very sad woman, coming to pay her last respects to a Man whom she had great hopes would be with her always. She dared to hope and believe that He was the Son of God. To her perhaps that dream now seemed lost. And to add to her devastation, when she looked into the tomb she saw it empty. His body was gone. He was gone. Even that last hope of visiting the place of His burial was taken from her.

Mary decides to go to Peter and John to tell them what has happened. In disbelief they run to the tomb and also find it empty. Believing the worst they go back home, leaving Mary standing there alone weeping. She again stooped down and looked into the tomb, and then saw two angels who asked her why she was weeping. She told them and then turned around and saw Jesus, whom she thought was the gardener, and asked Him where the body of Jesus was.

Mary did not recognize the Lord. Why? The Lord let His Human die and be buried so that He could show Himself to His disciples in a new form — Glorified — the Human made Divine. As we read, *“Jesus answered them, saying, ‘The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.’”* (John 12:24)

If you buried a seed in the soil and came back later the seed would be gone. Where did it go? Did someone take it? No, it turned into something else — a plant. A seed is very different looking than the plant that springs up, even unrecognizable.

After Mary’s inquiry about where the body was, the Lord said Mary’s name and she immediately recognized Him. Imagine her joy and her amazement! It’s all true! He’s not gone. He’s not dead. He is alive!

All of this happened in a garden for a reason. The story of the Lord’s people starts in a garden. For the Most Ancient Church, or the Lord’s first Church on earth, their history is told metaphorically in the story of the garden of Eden. The Church following this one, the Ancient Church, was again described

metaphorically by the story of Noah. When Noah came out of the ark, picturing the start of this New Church, he first planted a garden.

The next Church, the Jewish Church, was seeking a garden – a land flowing with milk and honey. Then the Christian church, based on the Risen Lord, began in a garden, as we have just seen. And the next church, the New Church, described in symbolic language in the book of Revelation, had at the center of the Holy City a tree – the tree of life.

These churches all have this connection to a garden because the Lord's Church is a garden – the Lord's garden. His garden, or His Church, was in danger of dying. If the Lord didn't come and tend to it nothing could have grown.

What gardener wouldn't take out weeds, strangling vines and thorns, and make sure there was sun for the plants. So the Lord did what He had to do to ensure the health and vitality of His Garden.

We are also like gardens as to our spiritual life. The Lord gives us the pleasure of tending the garden – or our life – with a real sense that life is our own. It is important to recognize that we do work the garden, but it is the Lord Who makes things grow. We don't.

If we don't do the work and provide the things for the garden, we won't have the benefits. So it is with our reformation and spiritual growth. We need to get active on our garden, or spiritual life, and when we do the Lord can create miracles.

We read, *"The things that you must provide yourself with are the knowledges of truth and good from the Word, from the doctrine of the church, from the world, and by your own labor. The Lord does everything else while you are unaware of it."* (Apocalypse Explained 1154)

May your garden grow and bloom beautifully this Easter season.

"Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. David C. Roth was ordained in 1991 and into the second degree in 1993. He has been pastor of The New Church of Boulder Valley, Colorado, since 1994. He had served previously as Assistant to the Pastor, Chicago Circle, visiting minister to Seattle and the Twin Cities Circle in Minnesota, and Assistant to the Pastor, Pacific Northwest Group. He lives in Boulder with his wife Susan (Buss) and five children. This article is reprinted from the Boulder newsletter.

What Is Our Message?

*Second of a two-part series excerpted from a presentation to
the Midwest and Canadian General Church Clergy
by the Rev. Derek P. Elphick,
Pastor of Oak Arbor in Rochester, Michigan*

I realize it's not common practice in the General Church to gather and analyze data (feedback) from the laity, especially about our message. It has been done, but not frequently and with mixed results. When I was in Theological School I was taught to be sensitive to and aware of people's states when preparing classes and sermons, but the idea of canvassing the laity to see if what I taught and preached actually resonated with them was foreign.

I wasn't aware of anyone saying we *shouldn't* do it, but no one was saying we *should* either. I suppose the unspoken rule was (and is) that the enlightenment of the priesthood, while not infallible or sacrosanct, is not open to vote. Since the subject matter is God's Word it seems immaterial whether or not people like it. We don't ask for "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" on the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule. Divine law is Divine law, period. That said, since the priesthood is only the delivery system for God's Word, and not the source, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't be open to constructive criticism, especially when someone tells us our delivery is not achieving the desired result.

So, what is our message? And what are people hearing?

I spoke about a disconnect between what we say and what others hear, and sometimes it is big enough to disrupt our ability to communicate effectively. With our long history of defending what the Writings say I think we have inadvertently lost our listeners along the way. While arguing in defense of ideas we've forgotten the needs of our listeners. This is an oversimplification, and I'm not saying the clergy is oblivious to

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I think we are at a disadvantage in not really knowing what our members think. (Until the recent General Church survey), we haven't canvassed our people, asking pointed questions, and getting the hard data that identifies important patterns and trends. All we could do is read between the lines and make educated guesses what church members (and non-members) are thinking. This is all I am doing in this paper since I don't have the hard data to prove my case, although I have talked with many church members over the years and much of what I've written here reflects their sentiments. Either way, it's important to talk about these issues.

Healthy organizations, like regenerating individuals, are *willing* to look at themselves, admit their problems, and make changes. I hope we can agree that the General Church, being the earthly church organization it is, is not immune to bad habits. I've heard more than once that one of our bad habits is the "need to be right," and that this perception hurts us. (Part of this may come from miss-applying the "Crown of all Churches" passage in *True Christianity*. There is, of course, the one true New Church in heaven, but we can't go around claiming we're it. We need to be more concerned about just living our faith and letting people draw their own conclusions.)

But how can we point to an impersonal thing like a church and impute to it bad habits? We can't unless we look at a church as made up of live people. That's what the doctrines teach. So it follows that a church gets its personality from the people in it and what they do. That's why people point to a personality like William Benade, the self-proclaimed High Priest of the General Church, or an event like the Nova Controversy, and remind you that *both* displayed a strong need to be right – so much so that being right became more important than exercising charity. That may sound harsh, even offensive, so let me explain.

Our mission as a church hasn't changed, and shouldn't change. However, if we want to fulfill our mission better it's in our best interest to make ourselves students of best methods and practices. There are many success stories out there. I'd like to see us have more of our own.

When I asked an outside professional to examine our message – all our General Church pamphlets, websites, books, etc., about seven years ago – I was told we seemed to have a strong need to define ourselves, our history, our philosophy and ideas. I thought that was a strange thing to say about us. What could be so wrong about stating who we are, what we believe, etc.? But rather than actually showing people how we could help them,

we seemed far more interested in making sure they understood us.

It wasn't that we were saying anything bad; it was more what we chose to emphasize. In doctrinal terms, truth (faith) seemed to be far more important to us than good (life/charity). In terms of our message, we seemed to be saying our ideas are more important than people. In my view this perception of our organization is one of the major reasons we're not growing.

As painful as this might be we need to hear it even if there's just a grain of truth to it. A church needs to be more concerned about helping people in their relationships than trying to convince them it's right. The priesthood is charged with maintaining "the soundness and purity of doctrine" because a correct understanding of the Word establishes the Church, but "neither is it doctrine but a faith and life in accordance with doctrine" that makes the Church. (TCR 245) We teach doctrines for the sake of people's lives!

The Lord's ministry was all about helping people in their relationships. Truth was the means, but helping (saving) people was His goal. Our job is similar. We teach truth, not for the sake of truth, but for the sake of life. (HD 318) A good and happy life is the goal, not proving we're right.

In offering a solution, consider the story of the disciples who had been fishing all night and caught nothing. In the morning the Lord told them to fish from the right side of the boat and the catch was so huge they couldn't draw their net in. Two things stand out in this story in the internal sense. First, it's addressing the challenges we face in evangelization. Second, it's saying if we are willing to shift the emphasis of our message we will experience tremendous growth – a full catch.

The shift from left to right is summed up by "*intellectual things, or those of faith, do not make up the church, but the voluntary things which are of love.*" (AC 709) This shift in emphasis involves a deliberate change in motivation, and the doctrines seem to support this argument since we're taught that fishing from the right side of the boat means "*to do all things from the good of love and charity.*" (AE 513:16) Once the motivation has changed so will the message, since to fish from the right side of the boat means "*teaching the good of life,*" (AE 600; CL 316:5) presumably in contrast to teaching the truths of faith. (AC 2231, 2517:6, 4844:3)

I'm not suggesting no one fishes from the right side of the boat. We pastors do a lot of it. I'm talking more about patterns and trends, tendencies we may have picked up along the way, even in our training – habits that make us pick fights when there are no fights to be had or that make us dwell on negative

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issues and concerns which may no longer be valid.

Once we make this shift in emphasis what we choose to say (and not say) will change dramatically. No longer will we feel the need to prove we're the "right" religion because helping people in their relationships will become far more important than winning an argument or proving a point. No longer will we feel the need to remind people of a passage like the one in *Divine Providence* which says "*man is a tiny hell*" because we'll know people feel that way already, and that they're looking for a *way out*, not a depressing reminder of their fallen condition. No longer will we wage war against "faith-aloners" because we'll remember they happen to be friends with our own church members. This doesn't mean we'll select only smooth sayings. We'll continue preaching the full spectrum of the Lord's Word, but do so "*from the good of love and charity.*" (AE 513:16)

When we fish from the right side of the boat we'll choose to emphasize the things that draw people together, not push them apart. We'll emphasize what we have in common with others, not what makes us different. We'll emphasize all the things people intuitively believe – that there is a God and He is one, there is a heaven and a hell, that those who are selfless and make themselves useful will have a similar role in heaven, that husbands and wives who have tenderly loved each other in a happy marriage relationship will be together again in heaven.

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After fishing all night and catching nothing we realize we've been preaching a message of "us" versus "them" and that it's getting "us" nowhere. And once we make the switch from left to right we're reminded that our net is indiscriminate in that it draws everyone in, members and non-members alike. And this reminds us that we're all in the same boat.

Fishing from the right side of the boat also produces a significant change of attitude in a congregation. That's been my experience. A negative message does not motivate people and never will. I've also discovered that preaching an "us" versus "them" message, however subtle or disguised, makes everyone defensive. This becomes deadly if we're expecting church members to share their faith with others since we've taught them to resist rather than accept newcomers.

So what should our message look like? Let me just share what we're choosing to do in our Oak Arbor congregation. There's no one right way to

craft the perfect message. Every congregation, in fishing from the right side of the boat, chooses to emphasize different things based on their talents, strengths, location, culture, etc. The important thing to remember is to identify spiritual needs, then fill them.

We've worked very hard on getting the message out that we are a marriage and family church which "*fosters healthy relationships with God, His Word, and each other.*" We developed a set of talking points around this broad message. Some are doctrinal and others convey the overall look and feel of our church. Here's how we position ourselves to the public.

WORSHIP — *Lifting our minds and hearts together to our Lord Jesus Christ*

- Clear messages that inspire positive change
- A picturesque and welcoming worship space that invites closeness with God
- A blend of contemporary and traditional worship styles and music
- Sunday school programs for children and teens

TOOLS FOR LIFE — *Enriching spiritual growth and relationships*

- Study groups, classes and workshops
- Programs and activities that help children and youth learn values in a safe and positive setting
- Counseling for individuals, couples and families
- Christian Bookstore
- Resources to strengthen marriage and family

COMMUNITY SPIRIT — *Connecting people through activities and service*

- Opportunities to work in cooperation with area service organizations
- Family-oriented activities, events and trips
- Moms-and-Tots Program
- A spacious and attractive venue for community events and special occasions

A NEW UNDERSTANDING — *We teach a new understanding of God's timeless story*

- Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one loving God. He is never angry and

never gives up on us.

- The Bible is God speaking through literal stories, parables and a systematic inner meaning.
- Heaven's happiness comes to life whenever we invite God to inspire our daily work and service to others.
- Spiritual freedom is a gift. God endows us with the capacity to choose our eternal destiny.
- Salvation is progressive and involves an ongoing process of spiritual growth.
- Marriage love between a husband and wife can become spiritual and continue to eternity.
- Life after death is real. Everyone continues life's journey right away as a complete person.
- Heaven is for all people who become angels by living according to the Ten Commandments.

FAMILY ORIENTED — *We are a family-oriented Christian church*

- Dedicated to fostering healthy relationships with God, His Word and each other
- Offering a new and inspiring vision of God, the Bible, spiritual growth, marriage and family, and the afterlife
- In Oakland County since 1940
- Member of *The New Church*, a global Christian denomination established in 1770

We're well aware that in accommodating our message to meet people where they are we run the risk of looking similar to other churches. This is a risk we're prepared to take for this reason: we want to *lead* with ideas first, and the "person" of Emanuel Swedenborg later. We have chosen to lead with ideas that speak directly to people's current needs in contrast to the more philosophical, abstract teachings found in the Writings. As a result, we have chosen to emphasize as many positive, practical, beautiful, uplifting teachings of the New Church as we can find. We have carefully selected all the teachings we think will resonate with the public – because they are things people either intuitively believe or want to believe. This is very important when building bridges with disenfranchised Christians.

We don't think leading with Swedenborg can achieve the same result since it introduces an unusual feature of our church which we prefer to talk about later, once key ideas about the New Church have taken root. It's equally important that members feel comfortable talking about the church and having

to explain where Swedenborg fits in is a challenge.

We have no problem talking about Swedenborg or any of the other more unusual features of our church, but we want to have those more in-depth conversations after the third or fourth visit, not on the first. Our approach is to give the public a chance by taking them along a gentler path similar to the experience of those entering the world of spirits. We are still communicating the “newness” of the New Church, but in lighter portions instead of a five-course meal.

We have so many strengths from which to lead which give us an edge over the old Christian Church:

- We can avoid confirming the appearances of the Bible (i.e. God doesn't get angry or punish; the Father and Son aren't separate, etc.). This makes the Bible more palatable.
- We can offer an eternal perspective in all we teach. Not only does this give real meaning and purpose to people's lives, it also helps motivate them to shun evils for the right reason since it's only from an inner or higher freedom that we can stop intending evils. (DP 73)
- Knowledge of correspondences and the doctrine of genuine truth enables us to unlock the inner meaning of the Bible. Only in a *New Church* congregation can you hear the stories of the Word preached in true expository fashion. This is where we shine!
- We have teachings which confirm what people *intuitively* believe or *want* to believe (i.e. the eternity of marriage, life after death, doctrine of use, etc.). This is huge!
- The Writings are full of insights into the inner workings of our minds – how we think and feel and why we think certain things. This spiritual psychology is very important and appealing. Self-help is popular because people want to learn about themselves. The sermons that move people are often those that help them know about themselves and can be put to use.

In terms of the message, choosing how to position yourself depends on a variety of factors unique to your situation, but each of us finds our voice by establishing a position. Positions are determined by the things we choose to emphasize in our teaching and preaching. But once you find your voice you'll join the chorus of General Church congregations around the world who are united in declaring the same Good News “*about the Lord, about His Coming, and about the things of which He is the Author, namely the things that belong to salvation and eternal life.*” (AC 9925)

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OUR AUDIENCE

After years of intensive work in Outreach I have learned three important things about our audience:

- Those who sit in our pews are our greatest asset to help the church grow, and if our congregations aren't moved by and comfortable with our message they will not share it with others.
- We need to do a far better job of selling our message. We can't assume automatic buy-in from anyone, including our own members.
- Members and non-members are more similar than different.

I have made the argument that to the degree church members feel moved by our message they will feel compelled to share it with others. It works when members actually invite non-member friends to church. We've considered that our message needs to be relevant to people's needs, and that a church needs to place its energy and focus on helping people in their relationships (charity), and not on the rightness of its position (faith). I've said we can't truly reach people without first asking them their opinion, without first determining if the laity is being fed by our message. And two case-studies showed the effectiveness of this approach.

So how can we do a better job of delivering messages that are relevant and compelling to today's listener?

I realized the first thing I needed to do was stop preaching "interesting" sermons, which by my definition are theoretical. They belong in the realm of teaching, not preaching, and make good classes, not good sermons. I found these sermons explored intriguing points of doctrine which, while fascinating to me and a few others, weren't so fascinating to the rest of the congregation. More to the point, I discovered that interesting sermons don't lead to change. How could they?

The doctrines are clear that the intellect, the understanding, must lead the way. (DLW 96, 406) We teach people doctrine so it can re-form their understanding. The enlightened understanding in turn teaches the will how to live a better life. (DLW 244) It flicks on the "light." But the doctrines are equally clear in saying that the will takes the understanding into partnership

with itself, and not the reverse. (DLW 410) I take that to mean that somewhere during the sermon the affections (the will) must also be engaged, and that you can't touch or engage the affections (the will) unless you reach down and specifically address people's needs (loves) because these are connected to their lives. *If these two things [the will and intellect] do not act as one, they are not of his life.*" (*Doctrine of Life 1*) Only when the two are engaged are you speaking to the whole person.

We "preach life" when we engage in the listener *both* the intellect and the will. The Writings specifically point out that the Christian Church was responsible for separating the two in preaching, with disastrous results. We're told "*the Christian Church at the present day preaches faith alone, not charity, and so doctrine, not life. And when the church fails to preach life, no one acquires any affection for good; and when there is no affection for good, neither is there any for truth.*" (AC 5006:3)

So who is this audience to whom we preach each Sunday? What are their issues, their concerns? What are they *really* thinking and feeling?

Every single person who sits politely and listens to you on Sunday is one decision away from moral, financial and marital ruin. Many are considering options with consequences that will follow them the remainder of their lives. There are husbands teetering on the brink of unfaithfulness. Wives whose schedules are unsustainable. Couples who are drowning in debt. Teenagers who are there because their parents forced them to come. Young men who have been told they are gay. Young ladies who have been told their worth goes no further than their physical beauty. There they sit. Silent. Waiting. Hoping. Doubting. Anticipating.

What are you going to say?

(From Communicating for a Change, by Andy Stanley and Lane Jones)

I don't think we should assume that those born and raised in the General Church are as convinced or sold by the message of the Writings as we are. We received a calling to the ministry, not them. Each Sunday, members and non-members are waiting to hear a convincing argument why they should break the status quo in their relationships and become better people. They sit there waiting to be convinced, not in defiance or because they are antagonistic or negative toward the Writings, but because deep down inside they want to change, but feel powerless to do anything about it.

So we can't simply quote a passage from *True Christian Religion* or *Heaven and Hell* and think that because it's from the Writings, and thus the Word of God, they will automatically embrace it. This audience is not an imaginary one. It doesn't represent the Old Church or people who should know better. It represents our own congregations, members and non-members. And there they sit – silent, waiting, hoping, doubting, anticipating.

Preaching to convince takes a lot of hard work, as well as a fair dose of

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trial and error. It's hard work because, as pastors, we're acutely aware of how our audience really feels, and we know that they come to church with the secret hope that we'll say something different this week – something that will make them want to change and be a better instrument in the Lord's hands, a better spouse, parent, friend and contributor to society. There they sit, waiting to be convinced.

I believe we stand a much better chance of achieving the noble goal of changing lives the more we study the needs of the listener, understand their issues, and craft our message around their world, not ours.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the General Church is to spread the news of the Second Advent to all who thirst and hunger after righteousness. This has been our mission from the very beginning, with multiple supporting layers like New Church education, evangelization, translation, etc. Each use plays a significant role in strengthening the overall mission, and yet, frustratingly, growth continues to be a significant challenge in the General Church.

Our strong desire to reach people with the news of the Second Advent is not finding a corresponding match in new membership. There doesn't seem to be an easy explanation. I have pointed to some likely causes such as a poor methodology for getting our message out and the likelihood that it isn't touching the lives of people in the way we know it should, but the causes remain elusive.

Logic dictates that if you can't reach people with your message you can't expect to grow. Growth isn't a goal, and neither is it a mission. It is the by-product of something much larger. In the context of a church, growth happens when you touch people's lives in a meaningful way. This may seem obvious but that doesn't mean it's easy to do (like shunning evils). Numbers are important to us as a church because they represent people, and when so few seem to be touched by the message of the Second Advent we know something isn't right.

Rick Warren of the Saddleback Church in California managed to reach 25 million people with his book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. How did he do it? He took on the big questions in life: "Why am I alive?" "Does my life matter?"

“What is my purpose?” He tied these philosophical questions to the practical issues of everyday living by saying that once you discover your purpose you will be able to simplify your life, reduce your stress, focus your energy, give your life meaning, and prepare yourself for eternity. Who wouldn’t want that?

The downside to his book is that it lacks spiritual depth; he can only go so far with the questions he asks. He also leaves the reader with an uninviting and unexciting picture of eternity. But what’s more significant than the limitations of the book are the 25 million people who bought it. What were they looking for? What were they hoping to find? I’m willing to bet most who bought the book were drawn to the promise of the title. Warren was able to deliver, to a point. So can we, and in a way Warren could not.

Our mission as a church hasn’t changed, and shouldn’t change. However, if we want to fulfill our mission better it’s in our best interest to make ourselves students of best methods and practices. There are many success stories out there. I’d like to see us have more of our own.

CONCLUSION

I would like to share some of the results that seem to be working in our congregation. We have worked on a systematic methodology for getting our message out to the public and have turned our energy toward positioning ourselves with a message that better suits members and non-members alike. I share these results not because they’re spectacular or because I think everybody should be doing what we are but because many of the things I’ve argued for here seem to be working for us. I feel good about that. It’s also important for us to share our small successes with each other whenever they come along. We all need a boost in this exceedingly difficult but rewarding work.

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Here are some of the things we’ve done:

- Created a website geared specifically to newcomers
- Run ads in the local paper consistently (long term)
- Made multiple changes in our Sunday worship format
- Rented building when not using it (5,000 visitors a year)
- Created a new music program for Sunday worship
- Re-trained myself in the way I preach

- Congregation received training in how to welcome and integrate new members (with a training manual)
- Measure all that we do and make quick adjustments when something isn't working as well as it could
- I make it a habit of surveying people (informally and formally)

Here's what seems to be working as a result:

- An increase of people seeking baptism
- An increase in attendance at Sunday worship
- Members are more enthusiastic, committed and active in church and school activities
- The sphere of Sunday worship is less rigid and somber and more conducive to positive change
- Church members are starting to invite non-church friends to church and school activities
- A more consistent flow of visitors – and visitors returning
- A stronger sense in the congregation that we have a mission, a plan, a desire to make a difference in people's lives



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Derek P. Elphick was ordained June 6, 1993, and into the second degree in 1994. He served first as Assistant to the Pastor of the Oak Arbor Society in Rochester, MI, for one year, then as Pastor of The New Church at Boynton Beach, FL, from 1994 to 2002. He returned to Oak Arbor where he has been the Pastor since 2002. He lives in Rochester with his wife Gay (Hodgell) and five children.

The Rule of 30

Rev. James P. Cooper

From time to time I speak to a widow or widower who has been left behind in the natural world for a long time. I have sometimes heard from them that there is great sorrow when they reach the 30th year because, they believe, that means their spouse has gone on to heaven without them. They believe this to be true because they've heard that no one stays in the World of Spirits for more than 30 years. Since *Heaven and Hell* 426 says this in so many words, they have good reason to think so. But what does that teaching really mean in our world? Does it apply in the way we think it does?

People are fond of saying that there is “no time and space in heaven,” which is something that needs to be understood in context. When Swedenborg says there is no time and space in heaven, he is getting ready to explain how time and space in the spiritual world are different from time and space in the natural world – not that they don't exist at all. (See *Heaven and Hell* 162 ff)

He describes how an angel's day is divided into morning, afternoon and evening and how there are different activities for the different parts of the day. That's *time*. He also describes how angels have homes that are distinctly and uniquely their own – reflections of their own loves and character.

An angel knows where his home is. He can go visit a friend somewhere else and find his way home again. That's *space*. So we can see that heaven really does have both time and space; it's just that they are measured by states of love and wisdom which are spiritual, rather than the relative positions of natural things like stars, planets and their moons.

So, if Swedenborg knows that in the spiritual world the notions of time and space are quite different from how they are perceived in the world of nature, why does he say that no one stays in the World of Spirits for more than 30 years? My conclusion is that what he is trying to convey is how that process *feels* to the spirit who is passing through those states.

Imagine that you were giving a spirit an exit interview as he was finishing up his work in the World of Spirits and getting ready to move on to his permanent home in heaven. You ask, “So, how long did it take?” He responds, “You know, I was a very confused person when I first came here. I had so many different ideas about things that it was really hard to sort out what was true from what was false, what was right from what was wrong. But the teachers here are so patient. They wouldn't quit on me. They gently led me by showing me what was really in my own heart, and helped me find the way. But, I was

a hard case. It seemed like it took 30 years! But now I'm truly ready for life in heaven."

If a spirit said that it felt like 30 years in spiritual time, how long would that be in natural time? Exactly. You really can't do the math. There's no fixed ratio between the natural and the spiritual.

Although there are always exceptions, it seems that the thrust of *Heaven and Hell* 494 and *Conjugal Love* 45 is to reassure those of us still in the world that earthly relationships are preserved and do matter to spirits. When we arrive in the World of Spirits we will be greeted by family and friends, and especially sweet will be the greeting of a beloved spouse who has gone before. There's no statute of limitations on love.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. James P. Cooper, who was ordained in 1982 and into the second degree in 1984, is Pastor of the Olivet Church and Principal of the Olivet New Church School in Toronto. He is also Regional Pastor for Canada and Secretary of the Council of the Clergy. He has served previously in Bryn Athyn, Pittsburgh, the Durban Society and Kainon School in South Africa, and the Washington, DC, Society and New Church School. He lives in Etobicoke, Ontario, with his wife, Karen (Jorgenson).



Karen and Mark Allais

Rev. Mark B. Allais

From a Love of Teaching

The Buccleuch congregation in Johannesburg, South Africa, helped to form Mark Allais. It nurtured his love for the Church. It was here that he felt a calling to the ministry. Now it is where he gives back as its pastor. It is, so far, a perfect circle of life.

Mark was born in Durban, South Africa, living with his family in Mandini, an hour north of Durban, and worshipping with the Kent Manor Circle to the north or Westville to the south. He remembers “very fondly spending many Sundays at home worshipping as a family and then doing projects and activities sent from the Office of Education.”

When he was in grade 4 the family moved from quiet Mandini to the concrete jungle of Johannesburg, joining an energetic group of New Church people then called the Transvaal Society. Just before the Rev. Norman Riley retired they found the property in Buccleuch and built a church and society building under the Rev. Andrew Dibb.

Mark attended a government school through grade 12 and decided to study mechanical engineering. During this time Andy Dibb offered a Theological School-type class to the men in the congregation. “I was interested in this because even though I had attended Sunday School and Church for most of my life, I felt I didn’t really know what the New Church taught. So I meekly approached Andy and he signed me up.” Looking back, he says, this

Editor’s note: This is the second in a series introducing ministers of the General Church, beginning with those ordained in 2009. Next: The Rev. Jay Barry, Assistant to the Pastor in Bryn Athyn.

was the foundation for a new career to grow and flourish.

He had to stop the class after about a year as his studies took him away from Johannesburg. After completing his National Diploma in Mechanical Engineering he was employed in the industry for 10 years. “Even though this was not the field I would remain in, it was an excellent training ground for me to develop more as an individual in confidence and life experience. I found myself being promoted into positions that would challenge me to step out of the shy, introverted box I was in, and instead to lead and teach people. I look back at the management positions I’ve held and the many people I have trained, and I can see the Lord’s hand bending, guiding and molding me to take on a new life adventure.”

While working as an engineer he was also getting more involved with the church, starting as an usher. “Then my Mom – a teacher – suggested I try teaching Sunday School as they needed help, and things just snowballed from there.

“I was asked to be on Pastor’s Council, then the Board. I gladly joined the music team as I loved to play guitar. I then asked if I could run a separate Children’s Church once every six weeks when the adults had Holy Supper and led them in songs, stories and activities.”

He became involved with the discussions and selection of a new minister, with Andy Dibb leaving and a call going out to the Rev. Chris Bown. “It was during this time that a thought struck me, and it struck me hard: ‘You could be the minister they call to come serve this congregation.’”

He didn’t say anything at the time, “the thought drifting in and out of my mind until one day I told my wife Karen, ‘Love, I think I want to be a minister.’ The reaction I got was not what I was expecting, ‘Well, if that’s what the Lord is calling you to do, then do it.’”

Two things influenced his decision. “The first is I enjoy teaching. Teaching runs in my family. My grandfather was a principal of a school, my mother is a teacher, my sister is a teacher and I found myself enjoying being a teacher, whether it was Sunday School, Children’s Church, or training adults at work. Second, I saw a need for South African ministers – specifically a need for a minister to serve at the New Church Buccleuch. Being a part of the selection process had driven home the idea that I could serve this use.”

Many ministers with families have to make choices, taking into consideration the call of the church and what’s best for their families. Mark also struggled with what he should do. “I wanted to do it my way, on my terms, but the Lord was patient and persistent.” He decided to try it part time and began studying under Chris Bown.

“I was very comfortable in the arrangement I had made with putting in extra hours at work so that I could take off a morning and afternoon to attend Theological School in Buccleuch. Then Andy Dibb came to South Africa for a week to train the Theological students here, and he sat me down and said I

should come and study in Bryn Athyn. “I thought long and hard about it. My wife and I agonized over it, but we decided not to go.”

A year later the Rev. Brian Keith, with his wife Gretchen, took them out to supper and asked them to come study in Bryn Athyn. “How many times can you refuse the not-so-subtle hints the Lord sends you? So we agreed and decided to change our lives and follow this new adventure before us.”

The Theological School was a great opportunity to study with intellectual thinkers and to be challenged. Mark had identified two weaknesses: Writing, which includes sermons, and public speaking, which includes preaching. “Even though it was a hard road, I look back now and am very thankful for the advice, practice and possibilities that Mary Heinrichs had given to me (as a speech teacher). It has allowed me to be more confident in my preaching and to find a way that suits me in communicating a meaningful, understandable message to the congregation every Sunday.”

Mark confesses that after his schooling in South Africa he let his hair grow until it was halfway down his back, and that when he first met Karen, she had just shaved her hair. “We were quite the odd couple.” Now they are happily serving as pastor and wife in Buccleuch with three little daughters, Emma, Phillipa (Pippa) and Vera.

After his ordination in 2009, he spent a year in Glenview under the Revs. Peter Buss Jr. and Mark Pendleton, which helped to prepare him for being fairly isolated in South Africa. He has been serving Buccleuch since July 2010.

The highlight of his career, so far, “was being called to serve in the congregation that fed me and inspired me to become a minister. Now I have the privilege of serving them and giving back to them.”

He likes to work with his hands, whether making something or fixing something, and enjoys maintenance around the house and church. He also likes to spend time with his wife working in the garden.

He sees his biggest challenges as personal. “I am the limiting factor in serving this congregation. It is one of my goals to keep on learning truths from the Lord’s Word but also continue to learn how to serve others better, preach better, lead better and reach out better. My hope at this early stage in my career is that I will be open to hear the needs of my congregation and will be open to guidance from the Lord to grow His Church.”

His favorite quote is from *Secrets of Heaven 8455*: “Peace has in it confidence in the Lord, that He directs all things, and provides all things, and that He leads to a good end.”



The Rev. Mark Allais with wife, Karen, and daughters (left to right) Emma, Phillipa (Pippa) and Vera.

Be Still and Know that I Am God

A sermon for the PAUSE launch by the Rev. Mark B. Allais

We are going to be talking about the preparation that has to take place in order to make space for God.

Let's think about preparation. Think about preparing your house for someone to come and stay with you. My wife and I had to prepare to receive the Bishop and his wife toward the end of last year. We had just moved, so our guest room was covered in papers and boxes. So we had a lot of preparation to do to welcome our guests into our home. We had to throw things out and move furniture around. Somehow we needed to get a bed into that room. It was hard work, but it was worth it. We knew someone special was coming and we made space for our guests.

The same applies to our spiritual lives. We need to get ready to receive the Lord as a special guest into our lives. We need to move things aside, to tidy up our lives, to put in the hard work for the Lord to come into our lives. Our lives are busy – full of work, noise and the things we think are important, even more important perhaps than the Lord coming.

We have family demands, perhaps children to get to school, sports events, music and drama. All sorts of events and time revolve around our children, keeping them active and learning.

We have the home to keep running, bills to get paid, things need to be in order, and we have to feed our families. Plus we have to make time for our spouses. All the planning and effort of caring for a family demands our time, attention and focus.

Perhaps our jobs keep us very busy, on the go all the time. New projects, new problems and always another meeting to attend. Lunch time is not a time to eat, but to catch up on all the work we haven't done. And then you have to fight your way home through traffic, taking more time and attention.

Our jobs are a big portion of what keeps us busy during the day. And then there are television, radio, internet, Facebook and cell phones. We can never get away from the office because our cell phone is always in our bag or our pocket, and always ringing. Text messages keep popping up on our phone. Every moment there is something else taking our attention away from the Lord.

A big part of our focus in life is on the world, keeping things going. “Am I doing all right?” “How is my family doing?” “Am I succeeding in my job?” But all these worldly demands keep us away from the Lord. Our work, our family and concerns of the world all draw our attention away from the Lord. These things are not evil or wrong in themselves. Yes, we need to take care of our family. Yes, we need to have a job. And yes, we need to know what is happening in the world. But when all these things demand more of our time and energy then we have less to spend with God.

Hell and evil spirits love to use the busyness of our lives to draw us away from the Lord. If they can keep us busy, if they make our lives seem like a mess and that we need to pay more attention to our lives, then there is less time for the Lord. They have won. They have succeeded in drawing our attention and energy away from the Lord and putting it into worldly things, which then start to become harmful to our spiritual lives.

All these demands of family, work and the world can become harmful as they attract and draw us in. We feel as though we need more money. We are not satisfied with the job we have or the car we drive. We always want more and better and we seek out the pleasures of the world. That is what the hells draw us down to – away from the Lord and toward worldly concerns that dominate our natural lives and become hurtful to our spiritual lives.

We are taught in the New Church that worldly things, demands of the world, and things we learn from the world that come into our mind, come in through the back door. Through the back door! The back door is the lowest part of our life, the lowest part of God’s creation. There is so much more that exists above this world. There is much more that we can strive for than just this worldly plane. So shouldn’t we then be opening the front door? Who will we find at the front door but the Lord Himself!

We should be going to the front door to find our life, to find our love, to find our purpose. Then when we find the Lord in our lives, then everything in our house can be put in order. And then the things that we do learn through the back door have a place in our lives because the Lord organizes our lives when we put Him first.

If we open the front door and let the Lord in, He is going to take the crowdedness of life away. The problems, concerns and desires that are piled so high in our lives, the Lord can put into order. He can put them in their place, in their priority. Our family, our work, all of those things can be set in order when we first open the front door and let God into our lives.

So where do we start? How do we get to the front door? Our house is so full of things already – of life, of business, of noise – how do we get to the Lord? How do we get to the front door of our lives to open it? Where do we start?

If we look at our banner hanging in the church, it reads: “Be still and know

that I am God.” Be still, pause, slow down, calm down, and make time available for the Lord. In the Pause program, I see this – making time, making space, calming down, being still – as the biggest challenge.

The Pause program is going to require us to clean out our lives, to move things that may be a priority and shift them. “That is not a priority; I need to shift it to get to the front door.” The Lord is priority. If it’s our job, move it out of the way slightly by spending less time thinking about work so that we can get to the Lord. If it’s family demands, maybe it’s reorganizing our routine to find a time where we can be still with God.

You decide. You decide how much you want to get out of it. You decide how much time you want to allow for reflection on life, on how things are going with your relationship with the Lord: “What am I doing? What do I need to change?” An important part of our spiritual life is reflection. And if we don’t give ourselves time to be with the Lord and to reflect, then how are we to grow spiritually?

So how much time do you want to give to reflection? How much do you want to be challenged in the things you do? How do you want to be challenged in changing your ways?

This program is about making space for God. How much tidying are you going to do in your life? How much moving? What work are you going to put into your spiritual life? Your spiritual life!

So the Pause program is a challenge, a big challenge for many of us. Clean out our lives, clear the stuff out away from the front door so that we can get to it, open the door and spend time with the Lord. Spend time in prayer, in reflection, in reading from His Word. By making these things a priority in life we open the front door and we invite God into our lives.

The hope is that through this program we can build a stronger relationship with the Lord. We can find a purpose – a renewed purpose for our life. We can find inspiration to give us the energy to go out and do things of service, to grow in love for our family, for our fellow human beings. Ultimately the hope is that we find true life, not just the life that the world offers, but true life that comes only from the Lord.

When we allow Him to come into our lives and order the busyness of our lives, we can find space for Him first and then for the rest of our lives.

So all of this is waiting for you – waiting for you to pause and make space for God.

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

Lessons: Exodus 14:10-13, Psalm 46:1-3, 8-11, AE 739:7

Meditate on the Word of God

Alanna Rose

Among the things Swedenborg charged himself with was “diligently to read and meditate upon the word of God.” This idea has been oft repeated from the pulpit. I recall being encouraged many times to go to the Lord’s Word. This is a simple instruction. What I don’t remember being told was to meditate on it, or more specifically, how to meditate on the Word of God.

At present, I don’t know of an esoteric chapter of the New Church. If there is one, and I have overlooked it in ignorance, please inform me, because I would like to take part. In my own life I have sought instruction in meditation from yogic traditions, meditation instructors, and more recently Sufi texts. They all repeat the same things in slightly different ways.

I have found absolutely nothing incongruous between these practices and the Writings of the New Church. On the contrary, meditation appears to me as one of the only suitable avenues toward embracing the radically unified vision of reality offered in Swedenborg’s Writings. Take this quote, for instance:

“Heaven, taken as whole, is a heavenly person because the Lord alone is a heavenly person. He is the totality of each and every thing in heaven and in the heavenly individual.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 162)

Sweeping ideas like this can be read with enthusiasm yet can still pass quickly out of the mind. Holding this same truth in meditation will offer the individual a new experience of it. I have read many beautiful things, but ultimately experiences are what change me. Meditation gives me a way to experience the truths in the Lord’s Word within my own body.

Within us faith becomes both spiritual and earthly, in that everything spiritual has to be received in what is earthly to become anything to us. Something purely spiritual does indeed enter us but we do not accept it. It is like the ether that flows in and out of us without having any effect. For something to have an effect, we have to be mentally aware of it and open to it. We have no such awareness or openness unless something affects our earthly self. (*True Christianity* 339)

The principles of meditation as I have come to know them are simple. Come into a seated position. Close your eyes. Bring your awareness to the breath. Make the in-breath and the out-breath even. This will quiet the mind. Let your breath lead you to areas of tension in your body. Release any tension you find as you exhale. From this silent vantage point you can repeat the Lord’s name or a particular quote from the Word. Surrender your will and

let your heart become attuned to the One. You will go deeper and deeper into an experience of this truth as you keep your mind steady and let your breath unfold.

Every meditation is different. There are times when I have been meditating and wonder if anything at all is happening, but when I open my eyes I always feel a shift in my energy, in my consciousness, in the degree that I am holding onto the thoughts that occur in my mind. I make a space for meditation every day because of the joy and the peace that it brings me. These positive experiences are at hand throughout the rest of the day. I can call them to mind when I find myself forgetting.

In the *Arcana Coelestia* this statement occurs: “To meditate in a field, said of Isaac, is to think in good.” (AC 3196)

It is a very straightforward definition, but its practice is profound. I think what is most valuable is the personal nature of the approach. We can all be preached to but to open the door of your experience to the God of all life is to embark on something only you can. It vivifies the variation and magnificence of the Word because no two people will receive it exactly the same way. We can then live from this new perspective, from an intimate connection with the truth.

“Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (Revelation 3:20)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alanna Rose is an artist making paintings and meals on a farm in upstate New York. She and her husband Garth Brown are building a house together and co-creating a cheese farm with Edmund Brown and Normandy Alden.

What Shall I Render to the Lord?

John Parker

What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people. (Psalm 116: 12,14)

Let us examine key words in this Scriptural quotation through dictionary definitions:

To *render* is to give in acknowledgement of dependence or obligation

Benefits are acts of kindness, something that promotes well-being

To *pay* is to make due return for services rendered

Vows are solemn promises or assertions by which a person binds himself to an act, service or condition

The Lord freely gives us life itself. He created and sustains our bodies, providing a physical world where we can develop and thrive. He gives us every needed thing. How can we show appreciation to our Creator for everything He provides?

He gives His Word for the healing of the nations and provides His Church where His Word is read and its understanding is taught. Our thanking of the Lord takes the form of financially supporting the expansion and development of His Church for the spiritual growth of increasing numbers of people. What is the Lord's share of our productivity? How much financial support are we to give to the Lord for the work of His Church?

Guiding our thinking on this subject there are several references in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Writings. In Deuteronomy 14:22 we read about tithing, "thou shalt tithe all the increase of thy seed that is brought forth in the field year by year." In AE 675c: 18 and 19 we read: "As ten signifies all persons and all things, it follows that the tenth part signifies everything. It is from this that tenths and tithings derived their origin, and these signified that everything was holy and blessed when the tenth part of the threshing floor and of the wine press, or of the corn and wine, was given to the Levites" (for the uses of the Church.)

That the tenth signified a blessing in all things, thus that everything was holy and blessed, is evident in Malachi 3:10: "Bring ye all the tithes to the house of treasure, that there may be food in My house; then prove ye Me in this, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing until there be no room for more."

Continuing from AE 675c, “to open the windows and pour out a blessing signifies the inflowing Divine from which is intelligence and life eternal; ... and this also is properly meant by the blessing that would be given if the tithes were brought; so tithes here signify that everything was thus blest.”

Quite obviously, from Malachi’s quotation, contributing tithes or 10 percent of one’s income to the Church was a practice of the Ancient Church. Around 400 years later, beginning in Christian times with the Lord on earth, through the story of the widow’s mite in Luke 21:1-4, He emphasized

It’s about reprioritizing our personal expenses to serve the Lord first, and then living on what’s left, rather than living our lives first and serving the Lord second.

that contributions should be genuinely meaningful, felt by the contributor to be giving up something of real value to the Lord, not just some easily replaced or disposable income. This story in the Scriptures illustrates that the meaning or intent behind one’s contribution is what qualified it more importantly than its actual amount. There are many sincere Christians of other

denominations, and some of our own, who are committed to contributing at or above the tithe level. I have known some and I respect them for it.

From its founding, and in its ongoing development, the General Church seems to have rested largely on major contributions, and following endowment income, from a small number of inspired members. From the apparent adequacy of those generous responses in meeting the Church’s needs, there appears to have grown a culture of general reliance or dependency on them by the membership.

It would appear that not much education and direction have been given to our laymen and women generally on the need for their *meaningful* and *regular* contributions to *their* Church. *Meaningful* suggests the real priorities we place in our personal budgets in determining what the Lord’s share actually is. *Regular* means just what it says – steady, measured, weekly or monthly contributions that those trusted with conducting the Church’s affairs can count on, reflective of our personal budget items like shelter, heat, light, water and food, etc.

When we really see the spiritual value of tithing in our contributions and determine to implement that principle as far as possible, by realigning the priorities of our lives, the task can seem daunting indeed.

Speaking personally, years ago when there were many mouths to feed, I

wondered how I could possibly raise my contributions toward that level. The best instruction I was fortunate to receive on the subject came from the Rev. Harold Cranch who said that once the principle was seen as an objective I should determine to increase my current contribution by at least 10 percent of each successive increase in my earnings over future years.

From the Scriptural representation of “offering first fruits to the Lord,” Harold also spoke of actually putting “the Lord’s share” into our contribution envelopes when returning home on payday, so as not to be caught short on Sunday morning in spite of our best intentions. In other words it’s about reprioritizing our personal expenses to serve the Lord first, and then living on what’s left, rather than living our lives first and serving the Lord second.

How much do we really value the Church and its congregational and educational development for the spiritual growth of humanity? What is our share in providing “the Lord’s share” in sustaining His Church? Serious questions for all of us. It has been said that if most of the Church’s members gave even half of the tithe – 5 percent of their incomes – there would be more than enough to meet all of the Church’s needs and plans.

“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Parker was born and raised in the Church and has lived all of his life in the Toronto Olivet congregation, except for two years at Bryn Athyn College, 1950-52. There he met and married Erska (Alden). They have raised seven children – all of whom have attended ANC Secondary Schools and/or Bryn Athyn College, and are blessed with 24 grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Church News

AID FOR THE CHURCH IN JAPAN

The earthquake and tsunami that devastated a large area of Japan in March have had a major impact on two small New Church groups in Sendai and Fukushima. With thousands of other people in the area, they have been struggling in the aftermath of the complete destruction of their homes and workplaces, loss of food and water, and potential radiation poisoning.

The Rev. David Lindrooth, Bishop's Representative for Outreach, and the Rev. John Jin, Regional Pastor for the Asian New Church, ask church members to consider sending contributions – designated “Japanese Disaster Relief” – to: General Church Outreach, Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009.

David and John assure that “These funds will be sent to a disaster relief committee in the New Church of Tokyo, who will use their expertise and business connections to ensure that the funds are going to support the most critical needs.”

They add: “It is a time for prayers and a time to reach out across the oceans to our brothers and sisters in Japan. The emotional devastation these people are experiencing is beyond words.”

PROGRESS IN KENYA

Duncan Smith reports on his return to Kenya that “developments of the church here are amazing!”

He is working with the Rev. Samson Abuga in Etorima and finds that two new classrooms have been completed, with two more on the way, plus a kitchen and soon an eating area. “We brought all crews here. A total of 12 men are working until we get timbers to complete one classroom at Riounde. The goal is to rebuild Samson's school and church, but it will take about two years.

“When I first arrived, I stayed at a neat hotel in town. It had a hot shower! Then I spent two weeks at Riounde finishing up earlier projects – another ‘traditional’ (means smoky) cooking area, then a larger water tank. I then went on to Masai. What a tough ride that was. I have committed to building a manse for the pastor, but they have to build the classrooms.”

Since last September, at least 50 members have been added to the Riounde and Etorima schools, which now have more than 300 and 200 students, respectively. The Etorima High School, now open for two months, has more than 30. Duncan says, “I am happy to tell you that they are all getting a solid New Church education. Our truths are taught daily.” On Wednesdays the



opening session is given by Pastor Khalid Rangi in robes. He also gives an evening class at least once each week .

Duncan has been able to provide some discussion and study sheets to all teachers once a week.

As a continuation of last year’s program of the elementary school learning the Ten Commandments, 34 new high school students are promised a small monetary gift if they read Arcana 8853-8957, which deals with the Commandments and their internal sense. The six new teachers have been promised a gift if they read the whole volume. Duncan says that by the time he left three students and two teachers had already received the gift. The balance of the program is being lead by a lay minister and teacher.

“We also have received inspections, and we passed. I am, however, required to find and purchase land for a separate campus within one year” – plus taking care of the inspectors’ to-be-done list.

“Ryan Cook, a second-year theolog, is very happy to be here, and I want to say what a real asset he is to the underpinning of the high school religion curriculum. He plans to be here two more months.

“I am grateful for all that is happening for so many souls. I pray it is God’s will.”

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to a very thoughtful and informative editorial in the November 2010 issue of *New Church Life* (*How the Lord governs the Church*). Specifically, I am addressing the particular phrase of illumination about the priesthood (pgs 462-463): “Thus the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Lord through the clergy to the laity by preaching.” (*Canons* 36:8)

There is no doubt of the truth of this statement that the New Church priesthood faces an immense challenge in their responsibility for teaching and disseminating the Writings. I think that at a certain stage in the development of the Church this model for governance is important. But I am asking if this model, at this point in time, needs to be supplanted by another model that can be taken from the Writings, thus providing a further developmental model and guide for Church governance?

I am wondering if a personified image of Truth and Good could not give more credence to an ideal from the Writings, such as the following:

“Knowing truth and good and acting therefrom, constitutes the external of the church; but willing and loving truth and good, and acting therefrom, constitutes the internal of the church.” (*Heavenly Doctrine* 246, cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 4899)

I am suggesting that the model of the teaching and preaching done by the priesthood be best carried out mainly by men (an inclusion of several women priests would be helpful) and that these roles be matched by an equally important partner that emphasizes ministry. I am suggesting that this be carried out mainly by women. She, (the woman minister) would need education in the Scriptures and the Writings that matched the preparation for the priesthood. Also, education in human development would be helpful.

This role would be defined as giving assistance in applying the insights of the Writings and the Biblical Scriptures to the particularities that are encountered in everyday life. These ministers would help the individual become more aware of the unfolding significant threads in his or her personal life experience, and give assistance with particularly difficult shifts.

I think this model of *governance* would help attract new members to the Church of the New Jerusalem and could help in designing effective strategies in the dissemination of the Writings in the world.

Janet Briggs
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

Editorials

The Hope of Easter

The two defining events of the Word for Christians – Christmas and Easter – happened 2,000 years ago but still are told each year in the present tense. “For unto you *is* born this day . . . a Savior who *is* Christ the Lord.” “He *is* risen, as He said.” This is because the stories of the Lord coming into the world to subjugate the hells, and His resurrection with the promise of eternal life for all who follow Him, are always in the present as well. They assure us of the Lord’s constant presence with us – always coming to us and looking for room in the inn, always with us in the struggles of temptation and regeneration, always rising from the tomb with the promise, “Behold, I *make* all things new.”

Every year winter comes to our land and to our lives. There is cold and darkness. We may feel despair. But every year that skeletal bleakness gives way to the budding hope and blossoming joy of spring. There is rebirth in the land – a landscape lit with daffodils where dead winter fields lay under a mourning sky. The soul is awakened to a new vision, bright with hope.

The eventual triumph of Easter is born of suffering, grieving and doubt – on a scale we cannot imagine, but still we know something of the Lord’s agony. We know this is not the “vicarious atonement” at the core of most Christian faith – the Lord taking on our sins so that we might be saved. We know that the Lord came into the world to subjugate the hells and glorify His Human, making it possible for us to be conjoined with the Divine, to be regenerated and lifted up to heaven if we but choose to follow Him.

In his Palm Sunday sermon on page 73, the Rev. Michael Gladish notes that the Lord’s weeping and grieving was not feeling sorry for Himself. He suffered because the people were not ready to receive what He was teaching them for their eternal lives. That, too, is a drama that plays out every day in the present tense of our lives.

Easter comes with steadfast promise: out of sadness, joy; out of despair, hope; out of bondage, freedom; out of death, life. So it is with the passing of the seasons into spring. So it should be with each of us.

As we look back to the foundations of our faith, we should also be looking ahead. As the new life of springtime surges through nature, so it can flow into our spirit with a rebirth of vision, purpose and love. It is not meant to be a

passive experience. Nature is at work. Regeneration is work. Loving the Lord and loving the neighbor add flowers to our garden – the heaven we make of our lives.

“The life of faith devoid of love is like sunlight devoid of warmth, as in the case in wintertime when nothing grows and every single thing is inactive and dies off. But faith deriving from love is like the sunlight in springtime when everything grows and blossoms, for it is the warmth of the sun that brings it out.” (Arcana Coelestia 34:2)

The enduring message of Easter is hope.

(BMH)

Love Speaking

“*With the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*”
(Matthew 7:2)

Have any words, in all of history, ever been so perfectly calculated to inspire patience, leniency, forbearance, forgiveness and mercy – in a word, charity – as these? Surely this is one of those places in the Word where the internal sense lies close to the surface and shines through brightly.

And what is the internal sense? It is not words, but the love within the words. (Arcana Coelestia 1492) This inner component of speech is expressed by the tone of a person’s voice: “...the words spoken are of thought and the sound in them is of affection.” Therefore, “there is no speech apart from sound, neither can there be thought apart from affection. Affection is the all of thought, just as sound is the all of speech, speech being only the articulation of sound.” (Divine Love 16)

It might seem that we cannot hear the tone of the Lord’s voice speaking to us in the Word, as people could when He spoke to them while on earth in Person; but we can hear it, spiritually, just as we can see the truth of what He says. Seeing and hearing really take place in the mind. The truth of His words (the “articulation” of thought) affects our understanding, the love (the “sound”) affects our will.

Both these components must be present for speech to occur. “There is no speech apart from sound.” The Word *is* the Word *with us* only to the extent that we hear it; that is, to the extent that we are affected by the love it is meant to convey. This is because it is the love within the Word that constitutes the essence of it; and it is our will, and not understanding apart from the will, that constitutes the essence of who we are.

The Writings do not just speak of knowing or understanding the internal sense, but of being “in” it. What does that mean, to be “in the internal sense?” Here is a beautiful example:

As the speech of angels corresponds to their affection, and their affection belongs to their love, and as the love of heaven is love to the Lord and love toward the neighbor, it is evident how choice and delightful their talk must be, affecting not the ears only but also the interiors of the mind of those who listen to it. There was a certain hard-hearted spirit with whom an angel spoke. At length he was so affected by what was said that he shed tears, saying that he had never wept before, but he could not refrain, for it was love speaking. (*Heaven and Hell* 238)

“Love speaking.” This is the internal sense. And here we have a hard-hearted spirit who was moved to tears by it. This is how powerful the internal sense is, and what it means to be in it.

(WEO)

Belief Isn't Everything

There is a tendency, shared by believers and non-believers, to make the question of “belief” the main thing. Believers say they have been saved from damnation by their belief; atheists say they have been saved from superstitious delusion by their non-belief. Neither is right.

It is true, though, that the potential consequences of belief and non-belief are great. How beneficial the one is, or disastrous the other, depends upon how thoroughly we confirm ourselves in the one attitude or the other by how we think and, especially, how we live. A belief is real to the extent it affects how we live.

We can see, then, that one of the main objections atheists have to religious faith – that it is a substitute for living well – does not apply to faith as defined in the New Church, which is to live well. “All religion is of life and the life of religion is to do good.” (Doctrine of Life 1)

Simple awareness of how great the topic is – “God” and all the mysteries contained in that word – should engender humility in us all, believers and non-believers alike. Belief in God involves such topics as the infinite and the eternal, the creation of the universe, the origin and nature of life, good and evil, and other such deep subjects. When you think about what it is we claim to believe in, our belief, at best, is a paltry thing; and so is our non-belief. Gnats

on the back of an elephant arguing about the nature of that creature may be more or less close to the truth, but even the brightest of them has an extremely limited grasp of the reality. And sillier still are the gnats who solemnly deny that the elephant even exists.

Which is why, in the New Church, our focus is not so much on “God,” but on the Lord. And our concern is not so much about what we “believe” about the Lord, but whether we love and obey Him.

Faith in the Lord is not the product of reason, although reason confirms it, but of love and experience. The experience of our need of being saved from our own lower nature, and our utter inability to save ourselves; the experience of the Lord’s power to lift us up, and the peace and joy a sense of His presence brings – this is the basis of faith. Belief is just an “Amen!” in response to the goodness the truth has brought us.

(WEO)

Life Lines

SHOWING US THE WAY

There have been many enlightened spiritual teachers throughout history, and no shortage of good advice. If half the wise teachings of the world's religions were put into actual practice the world would be a much better place. But the Christian religion is about something more than enlightened teaching. The Lord did not come to earth just to remind us to be good, but to save us from our sins. He was not just another wise teacher of truth, but was the Word made flesh – infinite Divine truth embodied in human form. He did not just *explain* “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” He *was*, and *is*, “the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

(WEO)

REMOVING OUR SHOES

“Willing suspension of disbelief” is a phrase used to describe the necessity for a reader to put aside the implausibility of a story and enter into it to get its meaning. There is truth to be found in all good stories, and it would be a shame to miss it just because some of the things described in the works of Homer, Shakespeare, Tolkien or J.K. Rowling, for example, are not historically factual or scientifically plausible.

Something akin to “willing suspension of disbelief” is also required if we are to discover the deep truths contained in scriptural stories. If from a love of what is good and true in our will we sense that there is deep meaning hidden in them, then that perception from above will override the skepticism of the natural mind.

Like Moses at the burning bush, we have to “take our shoes off” to approach the Divine – that is, stop thinking from natural appearances. (*AC 6844*) It seems strange that anyone would approach “holy ground” – the study of Scripture – in the same way as any mundane subject, but it is common these days.

(WEO)

UNBROKEN

The number-one best-seller this year is *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand, acclaimed author of *Seabiscuit*. It is the true story of Louis Zamperini, U.S. Olympic runner in 1936 at Berlin, and a bombardier in World War II. After his plane crashed at sea he drifted in a raft for seven weeks in the Pacific, then was

a Japanese prisoner of war for more than two years. He was savagely beaten and tortured daily by a cruel guard known as the Bird.

When his camp was liberated at the end of the war, a U.S. B-29 pilot dropping supplies to the impoverished prisoners said, “We could almost hear their cheers as we passed over. They looked so happy. It touched my heart. I felt perhaps we were the hand of Providence reaching out to these men.”

Years later, Zamperini was consumed with going back to Japan for revenge against the Bird. But he had an epiphany, remembering a promise made to God when drifting in that raft that “If You save me, I will serve You forever.” The nightly flashbacks to the terror he endured suddenly ended.

Zamperini dug out the Bible that had been issued to him by the military and went to a park to read. Hillenbrand writes: “Resting in the shade and the stillness, Louis felt profound peace. When he thought of his history, what resonated with him now was not all that he had suffered but the divine love that he believed had intervened to save him. He was not the worthless, broken, forsaken man that the Bird had striven to make him. In a single, silent moment, his rage, his fear, his humiliation and helplessness, had fallen away. That morning, he believed, he was a new creation.”

(BMH)

IF GOD DOES NOT EXIST

“If God does not exist, everything is permitted.” Dostoevsky is supposed to have said that, but apparently never quite did, at least not in those exact words. Still, it’s a good point: hopeful or threatening, depending upon your point of view. For some, to be freed from the limits on human behavior handed down by God in the Ten Commandments would be a dream come true; for others, the prospect is nightmarish.

Those who think getting rid of God is the key to progress argue that human reason and goodwill are sufficient to form a benevolent and moral society, without any Divine help. So far, the sociological test cases conducted in the 20th century by the first officially atheist states in history have not been terribly reassuring, but we’ll see.

(WEO)

TERGIVERSATE NOT!

Definition of *tergiversate*: “to be evasive or ambiguous; equivocate.”

An alternative, since there’s no excuse for a word like *tergiversate*: “beat around the bush,” meaning “to avoid answering a question; to stall; to waste time.”

Examples: The story of Jesus is similar to various myths. Swedenborg was a genius. The teaching of Scripture is unscientific and historically inaccurate.

Getting to the point: Was Jesus *God incarnate*? Are Swedenborg's theological works *Divine revelation*? Is the teaching of the Word *true*?

Re-emphasizing getting to the point: *Is the teaching of the Word TRUE?*

(WEO)

WHY MIRACLES?

Why complicate things with insistence upon such incredible beliefs as miracles, the virgin birth and the Lord's resurrection? Because they are *true*. And these are not embellishments, but the very heart of the story. Yes, they are stumbling blocks to casual belief. But the kind of belief that can extricate us from hell and prepare us for heaven is anything but casual.

The wish to neaten up and modernize the Christian religion by getting rid of the supernatural aspects is hardly new. It's not as if there were no skeptics before our modern scientific age; miracles have always been controversial. No natural agency could have overcome the hells and saved the human race, so of course the story of the One who did contains supernatural elements. Take those away and the whole story becomes pointless.

The Apostle's declaration centuries ago was just as challenging then as it is to people today: "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." (*I Corinthians 15:14*)

(WEO)